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THE NORTH SLESVIG OR DANO-GERMAN QUESTION

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IN northern Germany, just south of Denmark, is the little province of Schleswig (Danish Slesvig or Sleswic); it has been under Prussian control since 1866. In the northern part of the province are about 150,000 Danes; they have all along hoped to have this land, or at least the northern part of it, returned to Denmark, for in 1866 when Prussia acquired this province there was a clause in the treaty promising that the inhabitants of North Slesvig should be given the opportunity to vote freely whether they should belong to Denmark or to Prussia. But this clause of the treaty of Prague has never been carried out. In recent press dispatches (October, 1918) it was stated that the King of Denmark had sent a diplomatic note to Germany suggesting that she execute the terms of the treaty signed by Prussia and Austria in 1866. Later dispatches from Germany deny the receipt of such a communication from Denmark. These conflicting reports aside, it is not unlikely that when the fate of the Alsace-Lorrainers, Poles, Czecho-Slovaks and South Slavs will be determined on the principle of justice to small nationalities during the coming peace negotiations, the people of North Slesvig will also have their nationalistic claims satisfied. It is the purpose of this article to bring together the facts necessary to understand this North Slesvig question in all its historic and present aspects.

THE HISTORIC BEARINGS

The history of North Slesvig is a part of the history of two duchies, Slesvig and Holstein, which in 1864 fell under the control of Prussia and Austria and by 1866 came fully under the control of Prussia. These duchies had been owned by the King of Denmark since the fifteenth century. They had often caused international complications, but we shall need to speak only of nineteenth-century conditions. Although the duchies were owned by the King of Denmark, they were not a part of Denmark. Holstein was a part of the German confederation, but

Slesvig was not. Holstein and South Slesvig were German-speaking, but North Slesvig was Danish. According to a law of the duchies and by international treaties the two were indissoluble; whoever owned one duchy had to own the other. In the duchies the old Salic Law prevailed, which meant that the throne could be inherited only by direct male descendants of the ruling house. In Denmark this law had been given up. In 1848, Frederick VII., the last member of the male line in Denmark, became king and of course also ruled the duchies. After his death the duchies would go to the male line while Denmark would go to the female line. There was a strong party in Denmark that wished to have the duchies remain in possession of the Danish King, and if possible have them become a part of Denmark, at least that part north of the Eider River—the most of Slesvig. This aroused the fears of the German people, who wished to keep Holstein under German control, and if possible to have Slesvig become German too. The matter threatened to disrupt the peace of Europe, so in 1852 seven powers (England, France, Prussia, Austria, Russia, Norway and Sweden) signed the Treaty of London providing that the succession in the duchies remain in the Danish or female line, but that they were never to be united with Denmark. The Duke of Augustenburg, the claimant of the male line to the throne of the duchies, was paid an annual sum and induced to give up his claims.

In September, 1863, Frederick VII. granted a constitution to Denmark and Slesvig, thus implying that Slesvig was to be a part of Denmark. Frederick died in November, 1863, and his successor, Christian IX., promulgated the same constitution for Denmark and Slesvig. This was in violation of the Treaty of London. The German nation was aroused, fearing that German-speaking territory was to be forced to live under a Danish constitution. The German Diet declared in favor of breaking the Treaty of London and allowing the Augustenburg line to have the duchies. But Bismarck opposed this, for it would merely add another small state to northern Germany, a thing he wished to avoid. He demanded that the Treaty of London be observed by the King of Denmark, that is, that the constitution of Denmark be not applied to Slesvig. He persuaded Austria to support him in this demand.

As is well known, Bismarck wished to get these provinces for Prussia. Consequently he hoped the Danish King would refuse these demands and give Prussia a chance to enter a war of conquest. Therefore he falsely informed the Danish King

that the English government had threatened to intervene if Prussia and Austria resorted to war. The ruse worked: the King, expecting English aid, refused to meet the demands of Prussia and Austria. These two countries then declared war on Denmark, which after a short and decisive campaign ceded Slesvig and Holstein to Prussia and Austria to dispose of as they wished.

Just as Bismarck had planned, Prussia and Austria disagreed on what should be done with the duchies. This was the immediate cause of the Prusso-Austrian War of 1866; at the end of that short but momentous war Austria was forced to cede to Prussia the duchies of Slesvig and Holstein, and Prussia has ruled them ever since.

The Danes have always claimed, and on good grounds, that there had been various arrangements and occurrences that had strengthened the claims of the female branch, and that the Treaty of London was a crime against Denmark.¹ Whatever the merits of this claim, it is certainly far more valid than the claim of Prussia, which is based merely on the right of conquest. Since 1866 the Danes have changed their attitude. They no longer claim the whole of the duchies: they readily grant that on nationalistic grounds they have no claim to Holstein and southern Slesvig, which are entirely German, but they claim the northern half of Slesvig, which is entirely Danish. Slesvig has a population of about 400,000; those in the northern part, about 150,000, are entirely Danish.

ARTICLE FIVE OF THE TREATY OF PRAGUE

When Prussia and Austria signed the Treaty of Prague at the close of the Prusso-Austrian War, Bismarck inserted a clause reading as follows: "His Majesty the Emperor of Austria transfers to his Majesty of Prussia all his claims to the duchies of Holstein and Schleswig, with the stipulation that the population of the northern districts of Schleswig are to be ceded to Denmark, if they by a free vote manifest a desire to be united with Denmark." This article was inserted at the instigation of Napoleon III. to give him some comfort for his failure to play an active part during the Prusso-Austrian War. Bismarck undoubtedly had no intention of living up to this provision of the Treaty of Prague. In 1867 the Danish government requested that Prussia arrange for the plebiscite, but

¹ A. D. Jørgensen, "The Danish View of the Slesvig-Holstein Question," *Nineteenth Century*, XLII., 918-927, December, 1897.

received an evasive reply. At the solicitation of Denmark Napoleon III. now asked Bismarck to execute the treaty, but he retorted that this was a matter to be settled solely by the signatories of the treaty. Napoleon III. was unprepared for war, and, moreover, he was also negotiating for an indemnity in the Rhine country to offset the growth of Prussia's power which resulted from the formation of the North German Confederation in 1867, and therefore he would risk nothing more in behalf of the people of North Slesvig.² After Prussia had defeated France in 1870-1871 there was no one to intercede for the Danes, and when Prussia and Austria drew up a treaty of alliance in October, 1878 (which was the basis of the subsequent Triple Alliance), Austria consented to cancel that clause concerning the plebiscite in North Slesvig. And now after fifty-two years it is reported that Denmark is demanding that Prussia live up to the terms of the Treaty of Prague and let the people of North Slesvig determine their own political destiny. If these Danes are ever given an opportunity to hold the plebiscite there can be no doubt as to the way they will vote, for the treatment they have received at the hands of Prussia has done nothing but stir up opposition to the existing conditions.

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION

At the heart of the difficulty is the language question. The Prussian government has done all in its power to change the language of the people. It has required that all teaching in the schools must be in German. When the small children enter school they are allowed to speak Danish, for they know no German; but later they are required to speak German exclusively; if they use Danish on the playground they are punished. The Prussian government tried to Germanize the church services. In the state churches the services are all conducted in German. This has caused many on the border to go over to Denmark for religious worship; those unable to afford to do that have banded together privately and employed Danish ministers. This is not unlawful, but in one way and another, these meetings are seriously disturbed. A Prussian official must be present at every meeting. Sometimes the meetings are broken up on the ground that they have been held without securing the proper authorization. The pastor is arrested and through long delays in the trial is kept from serving his flock. The names of all attend-

² E. Bourgeois, "Manuel de politique étrangère," III., 699; A. Debidour, "Histoire diplomatique de l'Europe," II., 349.

ing such private meetings are known to the authorities and this information can be used in various ways against the offenders at suitable times. When Danes leave Slesvig to worship in Denmark or attend festivals or theaters their names are listed by officers on the border and on returning they are summoned before the district superintendent to give an account of themselves during their absence.

In the courts only the German language may be used. Danes unable to speak German must use an interpreter. If they use their own language in court they are fined. Germans and Danes do not associate with each other; each group has its own meetings and social gatherings. The Prussian government has permitted newspapers to be printed in Danish and six have been published regularly. But in one way and another these newspapers have been hampered. Freedom of the press has certainly been wanting. For saying things injudicious the editors have been fined and imprisoned; often the typesetters and other employees of the printing offices have been arrested or banished, thus delaying the printing of the paper.

There are also some German papers in Slesvig; they may print what they wish. Some are subsidized by the Prussian government and are urged to stir up feeling against the Danes. They attack the Danish delegates in the Prussian Landtag and the German Reichstag. They exalt German *Kultur* and belittle Danish achievements. The Prussian government even subsidizes one Danish paper whose purpose it is to stimulate loyalty to Prussia. Many bitter pamphlets and books against the Danes have been distributed in the province. However, it is a risky thing to say anything against the Germans. The Danish representative in the Reichstag, Jessen, was at different times imprisoned for a total of almost four years because he had made various harmless speeches that offended the Prussian authorities. For example, once he was imprisoned for four months because he said that one can easily understand why Bismarck would favor grain duties because he himself was owner of a large estate and would profit by the rise in tariff.

Three Danish societies, the Danish Language Society, the School Society and the Lecture Society, have been active in keeping up the Danish language and national feeling. They have distributed books and given encouragement to Danish cultural interests wherever possible to offset the Germanizing influence.

FURTHER BASES FOR ILL-FEELING

The main cause of ill-feeling is Prussia's effort to make Slesvig German-speaking. However, the government makes all possible efforts to check anything that is Danish. The Danish flag may not be displayed on a house or in the windows, but is allowed within the house. In all Danish homes one will find the Danish flag and pictures of Scandinavian statesmen, scientists and literary men. Since 1865 Danish songs may not be sung anywhere. Even certain Swedish and Norwegian songs are prohibited. At times the police have broken up meetings at which a certain song of Björnson, the Norwegian poet, was sung. Danish actors and lecturers are forbidden to enter North Slesvig. Once a lecture on the sun and planets was announced by a Slesvig Dane; the local officer prohibited this because he feared that the stereopticon views by which it was to be illustrated might present pictures of Danish persons and landscapes. A Danish society that has tried to improve the breed of cattle in Slesvig has been declared by the Prussian government to be political, and at all of its meetings a Prussian officer must be present, and its members must report to the officer when they arrive and leave.

The Danish colors are red and white. Hence no one may paint his fence-posts, barns or house with these colors. On one occasion the entire edition of a book with a red and white emblem was confiscated. The wearing of clothing which has the combination of red and white is regarded as treasonable by the Prussian. If people decorate the graves of their loved ones with red and white flowers they are punished. Once a farmer housed his black dog in a red kennel; the dog died and was succeeded by a white dog. Since the white dog and the red kennel produced the Danish colors the authorities demanded that the farmer paint his kennel some other color.

When special services are held in the Prussian schools to commemorate the victory at Sedan, the Danish parents are fined if they do not send their children. Many Danish young men have emigrated to Denmark and America; when they return to visit their parents they are stopped and sent out of the country. For some decades the Prussian government tried to force the Danish farmers to emigrate and have their farms taken up by loyal Prussians. Many wealthy Germans have bought lands and established villas. But in recent years the Danish population have resisted this movement vigorously. They have refused to sell their lands, the young men stay, serve

their time in the German army and return to Slesvig to keep it Danish.

In 1864, when Denmark ceded Slesvig-Holstein to Prussia and Austria, the two latter countries agreed that all Danish inhabitants of North Slesvig that wished to remain Danish citizens need not become naturalized and were to be unmolested so long as they did nothing to create sedition. No one born under Danish rule was to be banished. But after Prussia gained sole control and began her policy of Germanization she often banished Danes; in some years as many as five or six hundred were banished. Any Dane that does anything unfriendly to the Prussian government is banished. This often means the loss of good positions, business and property interests. Even the Danes that have accepted Prussian rule are subjected to annoyances. If they import Danish servants or harvest hands the government expels these workers; this may occur at harvest time when crops are lost if there is not adequate help. With all of these irritating acts of the government one would not be surprised to find that North Slesvig is a lawless country. The opposite is true. According to Prussian official statistics there is no part of the German Empire that has so few criminal cases as this region. There are only half as many cases of theft, robbery and murder as in the rest of Prussia on the average.³

North Slesvig is represented by one deputy in the Imperial Reichstag and by two deputies in the lower house of the Prussian Landtag or parliament. If gerrymandering had not taken place in 1867 there would have been more Danes in the Reichstag; there are three Germans and one Dane from Slesvig. The districts have not been changed anywhere in Germany since 1867. In these two legislative bodies the Danish representatives persistently protest against the injustice done the Danes and demand that the Treaty of Prague be observed. But their speeches are interrupted; the Danish deputies have no influence on German and Prussian legislation. However, their activities are a testimony to the fact that even a half of a century of oppression can not kill a national spirit.

³ L. Warming, "The North Sleswig Question," *American Journal of Sociology*, VIII., 289-355; W. Hartmann, "Germany and the Danes in North Schleswig," *Nineteenth Century and After*, LIV., 55-65; E. Givskov, "Germany and her Subjected Races," *Contemporary Review*, LXXXVII., 813-824.

ATTITUDE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE OF DENMARK

The Danish people have felt very keenly the spoliation of their country in 1864 and the mistreatment of their brothers across the border. The Danish government has not been able to do anything to alleviate the situation. It quickly saw that it could not use force to regain this lost territory; the only outcome would probably be further humiliation. However, the government has quietly worked to arouse the interest of the nations in the moral issues of the question, hoping that there would come a time when the attention of the world would be directed toward the solution of this problem on the basis of justice. So now, when Germany faces a reckoning on all sides, it is not surprising that the King of Denmark, according to press reports, has requested Germany to correct the injuries of half a century by living up to her treaty obligations of 1866.

Although the Danish government could do nothing to help the unfortunate Danes, private citizens of Denmark have done much to keep alive the national spirit of their brothers across the border. Many open-air meetings have been held in southern Denmark and the people from Slesvig have gone over in large numbers to hear addresses by Danes and other Scandinavians. Organized societies have sent libraries of the best Scandinavian literature into Slesvig. Many scholarships in Danish technical schools and in the University of Copenhagen have been awarded to talented young men and women of North Slesvig. Cooperative societies have been formed by the Danes to secure help for those farmers whose Danish laborers have been banished at critical times during harvest season. Through these Danish agencies the seriousness of this Prussian interference has been greatly lessened.

THE POLITICAL BLUNDER OF PRUSSIA

Prussian treatment of North Slesvig has yielded fruits no different from those in Alsace-Lorraine and Posen. The policy of Germanization has merely intensified the Danish national feeling. In 1895 there were 143,000 people in North Slesvig; of these only 8,000 were Germans, and many of these were Prussian officials. The second generation of German immigrants usually speak Danish, and even among the first generation one third learn to speak Danish.⁴ Prussia has not only

⁴ Warming, *op. cit.*, VIII., 311. In 1905 there were 148,000 inhabitants of North Slesvig and only 9,000 spoke German. "Encyclopedia Britannica," XXIV., 340.

failed in her policy of Germanization in Slesvig; she has also estranged all three of the Scandinavian countries, not merely Denmark, but Sweden and Norway. If Pan-Germany would ever have been practicable, if the Scandinavian countries ever could have been included of their free will, the mistreatment of the Danes in Slesvig would have kept out Norway and Sweden as well as Denmark.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE GERMAN LIBERALS

German liberals, both in Prussia and elsewhere in the empire, have often criticized Prussia for her mistreatment of the Danes. But these liberals do not wish the application of the plebiscite as promised in 1866. They do not wish to have Prussia lose territory, they merely urge that the repressive measures be stopped and the Danes given greater freedom. But that solution will never satisfy the Danes in Slesvig or in Denmark. The North Slesvig question has never been prominent during the Great War, but the recently reported action of the Danish King has brought the matter to the attention of allied statesmen, and if there is to be an application of the spirit of justice and fairness to small nations everywhere there must also be a reconsideration of the wrong done Denmark in 1864, and the people of North Slesvig must be given the right to vote on their political destiny. There can be no question as to the outcome; North Slesvig will vote to return to Denmark.